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Historic Districts Commission Minutes 04/22/2004

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: S. Makowka, A. Alberg, M. Hope Berkowitz, Y. Logan, M. Potter, B. Cohen, L. Kuhn, M. Penzenik and J. Worden.

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: M. Logan

GUESTS PRESENT: J. Salocks, D. Fisher, L. Lowenstein, J. Conley, M. Noonan, G. Kiely, D. Casey, N. Ferranti, C. Brelozs, R. Glauber, J. Ivers, M. Crewe, D. Powell, L. Ivers, A. Sparks, J. Barkan, T. Colman

1. Commissioner S. Makowka opened the meeting at 8:10 pm. Appointment of alternates was made as follows: S. Makowka and M. Potter to Mt. Gilboa/Crescent Hill and Pleasant Street. (S. Makowka and M. Potter's votes were not recorded during the formal hearings due to the arrival of two at-large members of the Commissions during the meeting.)

2. March 2004 minutes approved.

3. Communications

- a. 187 Lowell Street – A brief executive session might be held at the end of this meeting. Mr. Mackey might come before the Commission again. Commissioner S. Makowka is waiting to hear from Mr. Mackey's lawyer about a possible informal hearing next month.
- b. Inquiries – Regarding house for sale at the corner of Pleasant and Gray Street. There have been several inquiries from realtors and developers.
- c. Ben Cantlon – Has indicated an interest in becoming a member of the AHDC. He has been asked to submit a resume. The resume, a cover letter along with Thea Colman's resignation needs to be sent to the Selectmans office.
- d. "Design, Planning and Historical Fabric" – Commissioner J. Worden circulated a notice regarding a restoration and renovation exhibition conference at the Hynes Convention Center in Boston (4/21-4/24)
- e. Comptroller Letter – Town Counsel has agreed that based on DOR letter, Commission budgets cannot automatically rollover. Requisitions for known expenses need to be sent out at the end of the fiscal year.
- f. AHDC Archives – Patsey Kramer has placed the AHDC archives in a locked and heated room in the basement of the Whittemore Robbins House.
- g. New Homeowners – Commissioner Y. Logan gave the updated list to the Executive Secretary. Letters to be sent.
- h. Preservation Fund – nothing new.

4. Review of Projects:

- a. 29 Avon Place (Costa, 03-6a) 4/04 – Potter - completed
- b. 4 Westmoreland (Callaghan, 03-21M) – Makowka - completed
- c. 14 Jason Street (window change, w/o permit) – Makowka – Commissioner S. Makowka sent a letter to 14 Jason Street regarding window change without a permit. There was no response. It needs follow-up.

5. New Business:

8:30 pm – Formal Hearing re: Lot 47 Pleasant Street (Adjacent to 251 Pleasant Street)

This is an application for construction of a single family dwelling on the site known as Lot 47 Pleasant Street (located adjacent to 251 Pleasant Street). Mr. J. Artley, architect, made the presentation to show why the proposed structure is appropriate for this historical context. He presented pictures of abutting houses to the Commission. Commissioner S. Makowka asked if the applicant has front elevations showing proposed and adjacent structures. The applicant did not. Commissioner S. Makowka asked if the architect could tell the Commissioners what the peaks were. The house on the left of the existing property is 1 ½ story and the house to the right is a 2-½ story Carriage House. The proposed house is a 2-½-story house. Commissioner S. Makowka asked the architect to describe the plans.

(8:45 pm – Commissioner M. Penzenik arrives)

The question has come up in the past as to whether this is an appropriate lot to be built on. Commissioner L. Kuhn stated from last June 2003 Informal hearing that it is not a guarantee that a structure can be built on this lot. Does this space special or significant enough that it is unbuildable? Commissioner L. Kuhn stated that a buildable lot in the historic district is different since the AHDC have jurisdiction over it. Commissioner J. Worden stated that each property is unique. Is the side yard significant to the district?

Can a structure be comfortably integrated? Mr. Noonan asked if the Commissioners have a copy of the 1930's subdivision of Jason Heights that he will use as a basis for his argument. Mr. Noonan asked what the definition of appropriateness was. Commissioner L. Kuhn replied that the definition is not fixed and can vary based on specific factors present at each property because each property is different. Commissioner L. Kuhn complimented the applicant's presentation for their level of detail. Commissioner M. Penzenik commented that the massing and character of the proposed dwelling looks like a 2 family house and that the overall massing and height are incongruous to the surrounding properties. It is too big and too high. She added that this house would not have been built there because it is not architecturally appropriate to the adjacent structures. Commissioner M. Penzenik would vote against it. The architect replied that the style of the house is traditional and borrows from houses up and down the street. The footprint of the proposed house is smaller than the other houses around it and more Victorian in nature. Commissioner S. Makowka observed that as presented it would be a big house on a small lot. Commissioner L. Kuhn felt that the applicant had overworked the design by making a traditional 2-½-story house into a 3-story house. For example, the two dormers on top make the mass look bigger.

Commissioner L. Kuhn cannot approve the massing and felt that the front elevation is overly embellished. One of the great things about the lot is the set back on the right. In addition, Commissioner L. Kuhn suggested reducing number of columns on the front porch. Commissioner J. Worden asked where the chimneys would be placed. Mr. Noonan replied that none are planned since modern technology makes them unnecessary. Commissioner J. Worden responded that he perceived a chimney to be an important element of house design for other homes in this District; the absence of a chimney seems incongruous in this context.

(9:15 pm – Commissioner B. Cohen arrives)

The applicant was asked to address the siting of the structure on the lot? The new structure would be pushed back 10 ft compared with the house at 251 Pleasant Street to meet current code. Commissioner S. Makowka stated he sensed there was a consistent level of opposition to the project as proposed and reminded the applicant that at the informal meeting almost a year earlier, the AHDC had reacted to the options presented to it but had not and could not guarantee that the Commission would approve any design presented by the applicant. In terms of process, the applicant can either ask for a formal vote on the proposal before it or for a continuance in order to prepare a modified proposal.

Commissioner S. Makowka invited the public's comments. M. Crewe (14 Brunswick Rd.) felt that the applicant has a nice plan.

There are a lot of high houses in the area and the dormers make the house look less like a blockhouse. She also does not think that it looks like a 2 family house. It looks livable and sellable. J. Crewe stated that chimneys are no longer necessary due to technology.

R. Glauber (221 Pleasant St) was shocked by the proposal. He felt that the proposed house has too many extraneous in details and doesn't relate at all to the surrounding houses. N. Ferranti (243 Pleasant St.) felt that the proposed house is too busy with too many features, which makes it overwhelming. She would love to see the lot stay empty. Commissioner S. Makowka would like to see an accurate footprint with respect to abutters. He suggested a scaled plot plan.

The applicant comments that he felt that he was being held to an arbitrary standard and that he would like certainty about what would or would not be approved. The applicant asked what the difference was between a denial and a hearing continuance. If denied, the case will be closed and the applicant will have to resubmit an application. Commissioner L. Kuhn is not against the architectural elements used, Commissioner M. Penzenik suggested that the architect take some cues from Tudor houses. Commissioner S. Makowka summarized that he felt that the applicant was had received consistent feedback from the commissioners that they were not necessarily opposed to any structure on the lot, but that the proposal before it is too big and too high for the location and the combination of design elements create the feel of a two-family design that is not appropriate in this context. Also, the Commission cannot design the acceptable house for the applicant but can only react to what is before it. Commissioner B. Cohen informed the applicant that some hearings have gone on for 2-3 months and that informal hearings serve as an opportunity for a dialogue between the AHDC and the applicants. She also added that what the applicant is proposing is not a simple repair of a structure but the actual building of new structure. Commissioner J. Worden added that this house looked like a 2 family house. The applicant agreed to a continuance until June 24th. This hearing will continue on May 27th at 8:30 pm.

10:00 pm – Informal Hearing: 22 Montague Street

The description of the proposed work areas follows:

- a. Removal of green stucco encasement of underneath side porch and replacement with lattice similar to 4 Westmoreland. The previous owner covered the sun porch's support beams with 1970's style stuccowork, which the applicants would like to remove and replace with lattice that virtually every house in the historic district displays. The area right now receives no ventilation and could become structurally unsound due to excessive moisture.
 - b. Removal of green stucco/concrete around exterior foundation and restoration of whatever is underneath (interior is tone rubble foundation). The previous owner covered the section of foundation that rises above the ground with a concrete/stucco layer. The applicants would like to restore the exterior foundation to its original appearance consistent with other older homes in the area. The current layer conceals the original stonework and traps moisture, contrary to the plan of the original builders.
 - c. Installation of decorative safety fence around the front and back yards. The applicants seek to delineate a bare, corner lot while providing security for the young children in residence. The fence proposed would be consistent with other fences in the surrounding neighborhood and similar in style to fences around the time the house was constructed. The applicant proposed to duplicate 16 Montague's picket fence with flat rails, 3 feet tall and unpainted.
- The applicant also asked about reshingling the roof with similar color and style shingles and repointing the chimney to repair to a safer condition. Commissioner Makowka suggested that the applicant submit an application for a certificate of non-applicability,

which could be issued under that procedure formalized above.. A formal hearing will be held at 9:00 pm on May 27th for the rest of the proposals.

1015 pm – Informal Hearing: 395 Massachusetts Avenue

This is an application for non-applicability for an addition of a door to the staircase on the third floor at the rear of building that is out of public view. There was a discussion of the 3rd floor and egress to make sure that what is proposed is not visible from the public view. Commissioner B. Cohen moved that a certificate of non-applicability should be issued. Commissioner A. Alberg seconded the motion. All voted in favor. Commissioner Cohen was appointed monitor.

10:30 pm – Informal Hearing: 79 Crescent Hill

This is an application to repair and replace shingles/clapboard siding and paint. All the replacement elements shall be “like for like” with no change on the types of materials used or in design. Commissioner B. Cohen moved that a certificate of non-applicability should be issued. Commissioner M. Penzenik seconded the motion. All voted in favor. Commissioner Cohen was appointed monitor.

10:35 pm – Informal Hearing: 82 Westminster Avenue

The applicant would like to remove the side door at 82 Westminster Avenue in order to put in a lavatory. She proposes filling the door and removing the associated side porch. There are changes proposed to the deck at the rear of the house.. If the rear deck project is not visible from the rear it does not require a Certificate of Appropriateness. Commissioner S. Makowka suggested that a formal hearing was required for the door/porch project because part of the exterior structure is being removed. The applicant also asked about the possibility of building a driveway in the front of the house. The Commissioners suggested that she first speak with the town engineering department to see if that is even allowable per the town zoning code.

10:50 pm – Informal Hearing: 72 Westminster Avenue

This is an application to rebuild existing rear deck to existing design with the addition of uniform material elements and proper support & fastenings. Existing lattice to be replaced with square “privacy” lattice, railings to have 1 ½ inch square balusters spaced 3 inches on center, posts to have square caps, and the handrail to have appropriate (non-flat) profile. Pressure treated wood may be used for structural elements but may not be exposed. After some discussion the Commission suggested that the proposed synthetic composite material be approved on a limited basis solely for use as decking material. The Commission stressed that this material had not previously been approved in a historic district and was only being approved in this instance due to the limited visibility of this installation on the rear façade of the house. It was agreed that this approval should have no precedential impact on any future suggested applications of this material. It was moved that due to the insubstantial effect on the historic aspects or architectural character of the district, the project be approved with the modifications and clarifications indicated pursuant to a 10-day period of comment from interested parties. The motion was seconded and all voted in favor. Commissioner Y. Logan will be monitor.

11:05 pm – Informal Hearing: 159 Pleasant Street

The applicant states that he has an interest in developing the barn at 159 Pleasant Street and is interested to know as a developer what type of changes would be allowed to that structure. In particular, would it be possible to move the barn forward on the lot and could changes be made to create more livable space. The developer showed a number of rough sketches of proposed changes to the barn. First the Commission reminded the developer that this was only an informal hearing and that the Commission would not be able to make any formal decisions or approve any particular plan. While the individual commissioners could react to the rough sketches, there was no guarantee that any application would ultimately be approved. Second, the Commission informed him that interior changes and repair or replacement with like materials did not require a Certificate of Appropriateness. Third, the commissioners expressed their opinion that this barn structure is of special historical significance given its age, prominent location within the district, and the fact that this is one of the few remaining examples of this type of structure in Arlington. Due to this importance, the commissioners suggested that no changes to the front façade of the barn would found appropriate. Also, due to the siting on the lot, it was unlikely that the structure could be moved without irreparably affecting the barn’s secondary relationship to the main house. Finally, the commissioners suggested that some unobtrusive changes to the rear elevations such as a rear dormer are likely to be the type of change that is most likely to be found appropriate. The applicant thanked the commissioners for their time and indicated his interest in have a formal hearing next month.

6. Other Business:

- a. Website —no report.
- b. Members needed for Central Street and Broadway – an announcement should be sent to the Advocate.
- c. Missing Signs – Public Works
- d. Academy Street Extension – M. Hope-Berkowitz has received no response.
- e. Certificate Issuance Process – Commissioner S. Makowka has received numerous inquiries about projects that are eligible for a Certificate of Non-Applicability. Rather than require a presentation of an application for a project that is unambiguously beyond the

Commission's jurisdiction, Commissioner Makowka asked the rest of the commissioners if they felt it appropriate for him or another elected officer of the Commission to issue such a certificate upon receipt of the application. It was suggested that 1) any such approval be announced at the next regularly scheduled meeting and 2) that a monitor be appointed at that time to ensure that work is done as proposed. The motion was made and seconded to adopt this policy with the recommended changes. All voted in favor.

f. Notary – The AHDC felt that a notarized certificate while not legally required, continued to be desirable in that it makes the issuance more official.

g. FY 2004

h. Executive Session - postponed

Commissioner S. Makowka moved to adjourn at 11:20 pm. Commissioner B. Cohen seconded. All voted in favor.

Respectfully submitted by,

Anne-Mer Slebodnick
Executive Secretary

cc: HDC Commissioners
Arlington Historical Commission, Mr. Robert Botterio
Building Inspector, Mr. Michael Byrne
Planning Department and Redevelopment Board, Mr. Kevin O'Brien
Massachusetts Historical Commission
Town Clerk
Robbins Library